

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, playing with a large cardboard box on a grassy field. The boy, in the foreground, is wearing a dark blue jacket and is crouched over the box. The girl, behind him, is wearing a bright yellow-green shirt and is also crouched. In the background, other children and adults are visible, suggesting a community event. The sky is overcast.

Chwarae Cymru
Play Wales

Making community events playful

www.play.wales

Community events are ideal opportunities to meet with other people of all ages in a fun and friendly way within the neighbourhood – and to promote the importance of play.

Ensuring that community events are playful means that children, teenagers and adults can meet and spend time alongside each other in a relaxed way. When children are given the opportunity to play, they meet and get to know other children and adults in the neighbourhood, building familiarity, trust and a community spirit. This helps parents to gain confidence to allow children to play out at other times of the year.

Play is every child's right

The importance of children's play is recognised throughout the world. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states in Article 31 that every child has the right to play.

This convention – which lists the rights of all children and teenagers – applies to all children and teenagers, whoever they are, wherever they live and whatever they believe. Playing is every child's right wherever they are – at home, in childcare or at school, and out in their community. It is important to make sure children have the space, time and company of others to play.

Playing is good for children

Children benefit most when they are in charge of their play. When children choose what to play, who to play with, and how to organise their play, they have more fun.

Playing is good for every child. For example:

- playing is essential for children's mental health and wellbeing.
- playing helps children cope with stress and anxiety and fosters resilience, enabling children to better deal with challenges.
- playing gives children the opportunity to have fun, laugh, take time out, relax, and build friendships.

- laying outside allows children to appreciate nature, the environment, and feel part of their community.
- playing is fundamental to children's happiness, and happy children lead to happier communities.





Creating a playful experience

Organising a playful community event can often be seen by adults as the need to provide activities for children. This is not the case, as children will find ways to play if they are given time, space, freedom and stuff to play with. Considering how these elements can be included in an event will make it more playful and prevent children from being bored. It will offer choice and play value for a wide range of interests and abilities where children can play in their own way.

A playful event does not need any specialist equipment. Children and families can be very resourceful and creative in the way the space is used and what can be played with. Paddling pools, chairs, bicycles, scooters, hoops, stilts, chalk and bubbles are resources that are usually easily and readily available. When items are brought out to a community event, children can share them and they can be used in an unstructured, informal way.

Remembering how you played as a child can help to draw up a list of things that can be provided, then step back and let children play without interrupting or telling them how to do it. If children ask for help or for ideas, adults should get involved – if invited to do so. Just remember not to take over, or children will lose interest and stop playing.

Older people in the community may enjoy sitting, watching and listening to children playing. By providing seating such as garden or camping chairs, older children will appreciate being included in the event. Seating will also help parents step back, chat with neighbours and enjoy the event.

Taking photos throughout the event, of children and adults enjoying themselves, is a good way to document the occasion. It also demonstrates to others what happened through reports in community newsletters and newspapers as well as on local social media groups. Depending on where your community event is being held, you may need to arrange parental permission before taking photos of the children.

Simple low-cost play ideas

Some simple and low-cost play ideas for making your community event more playful, for children of all ages.

Water – great for cool fun on a warm day

- Paddling pools or large trays of water with pans, jugs and bath toys – great for smaller children
- Tarpaulin sheets laid flat or down a slope make great water slides, adding washing up liquid and a bucket of water or two
- Buckets and sponges for water fights.

Sand and mud – building sandcastles and making mud pies

- Sheets of tarpaulin or large flowerpots, planters or trays to hold the sand or mud
- Bowls, sieves, trowels, spades, plastic tubs and yoghurt pots for digging and making moulds.

Building – for making dens and other structures

- Cardboard boxes
- Sheets of fabric, old sheets and blankets, tarpaulins
- Wood, nails, hammers, saws (good idea to keep a close watchful eye)
- Duct tape, sticky tape
- Bamboo garden canes
- Old pallets
- Rope.

Climbing and balancing – for providing challenge

- Chairs, or wood blocks, old tyres and bricks for balancing planks of wood on to walk across
- Other suitable props for balancing planks of wood on to make ramps for walking on or riding skateboards or making a balance board
- Tin can stilts for younger children
- Assault or obstacle courses.

Getting creative

- Chalks for pavements and tarmac (easily washed away with water after the event)
- Scrap or recyclable materials such as yoghurt pots, egg boxes, cereal boxes, carpet tubes, old rolls of wallpaper and paper
- Water based paint, pens, glue, glitter, tape and string
- Old clothes and curtains for dressing up
- Shaving foam in trays and bowls
- Paint for finger painting or making prints with hands and feet
- Cornflour mixed with a little water to make gloop
- Homemade play dough.

Getting physical

- Ropes for skipping games
- Hoops, balls and frisbees
- Make sure there are some dedicated open spaces to run, play tag, ride bikes or play with balls and frisbees
- Old pillows for pillow fights.

Sourcing resources

- Ask local businesses if they have recyclable resources that could be used for playing such as carpet tubes and large cardboard boxes
- Ask local people to collect household scrap such as bottles, yoghurt pots, plastic tubs, egg boxes and toilet rolls
- Look in the garden shed for old flowerpots, seed trays, and other equipment that is easily cleaned and appropriate.

Advocating for play

Our *Playful Childhoods* website aims to help parents, carers and community groups give children plenty of good opportunities to play at home and in their neighbourhood. It's also beneficial for local groups and town and community councils to provide play friendly neighbourhoods in their areas.

The website provides:

- practical ideas about providing time, space and stuff to play with
- top tips, 'how to' guides and ideas for children's play
- information about raising awareness about the importance of play
- guidance about planning a community play area
- examples of playful communities and projects across Wales.

The website has been developed to support:

- parents in giving their children opportunities to play
- parents so they feel confident about letting their children play outside in their neighbourhood

- the development of playful neighbourhoods for children across Wales
- a shared understanding of the importance of play for children and teenagers by all adults across Wales.

The website is full of practical information and ideas for making childhoods and communities more playful:

www.playfulchildhoods.wales

Giving children permission to play close to their home and those of their friends helps them gain an understanding of the world they live in, as they learn to deal with situations outside the home, without being too far away from adults. This is an important step to gaining self-reliance and greater independence for going to the park, the local shop or walking to school, or other local places on their own.

Organising a community event that recognises the importance of children playing and having fun is a great way to support a child's right and need to play within their neighbourhood.





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Play Wales is the national organisation for children's play, an independent charity supported by the Welsh Government to uphold children's right to play and to provide advice and guidance on play-related matters.